Electronic Tigers of Southeast Asia
by Drew McDaniel
reviewed by Sam Swan

Electronic Tigers of Southeast Asia: The Politics of Media, Technology, and National Development by Professor Drew McDaniel of Ohio University is an excellent addition to the growing knowledge of media in developing countries.

Published in 2002, it is the first in a series of books in international communication edited by Joseph Straubhaar of the University of Texas and Douglas Boyd of the University of Kentucky.

Professor McDaniel is a well known expert on international communication, especially the media of Southeast Asia. His latest book builds on his earlier text Broadcasting in the Malay World published in 1994. Electronic Tigers of Southeast Asia is structured as a supplementary text for classes in international communication. The book contains 9 chapters with a total of 218 pages. The chapters are organized logically providing the reader with sufficient historical background to be able to understand the context for media development in Southeast Asia. The book focuses on the countries of Philippines, Indonesia, Brunei, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and Myanmar. Chapter One provides an excellent overview of the history of the region so that students and readers will be more able to understand the chapters which follow.

McDaniel organizes the remaining chapters of the book into several categories. A chapter is devoted to media policy in the region. Separate chapters examine the development of home video, satellites, technology infrastructure, the Internet, media content and audience research, and legal issues affecting communications in Southeast Asia.

Most of the book is written from a historical perspective. McDaniel provides the reader with a comprehensive analysis of the events leading up to 2000 related to media development in Southeast Asia. His historical analysis includes both political as well as communication developments and he discusses the interrelationships between the two.

The author’s methodology is historical. He reviews numerous publications in formulating his arguments. Books, scholarly articles, and trade publications are referenced throughout the book. McDaniel provides a comprehensive literature review for media development in the region. While the book is based primarily on secondary sources, it is clear that McDaniel has studied the region for many years and is a leading expert in the field.

Electronic Tigers of Southeast Asia is written in a way that almost any reader could understand and learn from. I believe the text would be useful both undergraduate and graduate level classes. McDaniel’s writing style is very easy to read. He is logical in his presentation. Most chapters have a clear introduction body and conclusion. I thought it might be helpful for some readers if all chapters would have contained a summary of main points.

Chapter One concludes with a summary, but other chapters do not. The final chapter of the book serves as a general summary, but internal summaries throughout the book may help readers follow the main points of each chapter.
The book provides in-depth analysis of media development in Southeast Asia. This is the first compilation of materials about media development in the region and it offers a comprehensive analysis of the reasons behind the development of each medium in each country of the region.

McDaniel’s text contributes new knowledge and understanding about the region.

I was particularly impressed by the chapter on the development of satellites in the region. The impact of satellites in Malaysia and Indonesia was very clear and has revolutionized the region. The chapter on the development of the Internet in the region was equally impressive. While governments in the region over the years have attempted to control the flow of information through traditional media, the development of the Internet and Satellite technologies have provided new challenges. McDaniel does an excellent job of explaining these developments and the lessons learned in Southeast Asia may be applicable to other regions of the world.

While the title of the book refers to Southeast Asia, the book seems to be more about a few of the countries of the region rather than to the whole region. McDaniel spends much of the book talking about Malaysia and the development of the media there. He also focuses on Indonesia and to a lesser extent on Singapore. Some of the other countries in the region are discussed in less detail. This is probably due to the fact that less has been published about media development in Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, etc. Another way to have organized each chapter of the book would have been to have discussed each chapter’s topic by country. Some chapters are structured that way and I found that approach useful in making distinctions among countries. It is difficult to generalize from one country to another about the many issues discussed in the book. A simple listing of the similarities and differences among countries would enable the reader to grasp the main points of each chapter more clearly. Tables showing comparisons would have also helped. Tables were provided in the chapter on audience research, but it would have helped to have seen similar comparisons on satellite penetration, home video penetration, radio usage, TV usage, etc.

The author focuses much of his attention to the development of new media in Southeast Asia. While he discusses the development of private radio and television as well as newspapers, he spends much more time on the development of satellite and Internet technologies. There is also very little mention of the development of cable television. The author says this is due to the fact that cable has not really developed in the region. The reader could use additional information about why cable has not developed. The development of commercial radio and television within the context of free market economies was discussed but could have been developed in greater detail. The development of media and local and national economies are inextricably connected and the interrelationships in Southeast Asia could have been explored in more detail. More attention to advertising-supported media may have helped the reader understand the economic realities faced by private media organizations in the region. For instance, while there are many private FM radio stations in Indonesia, few seem to be prospering due to the lack of support from advertisers.

At the end of the book, McDaniel offers his concluding thoughts. He summarizes the main points made in each chapter. Some readers may want to read only the last chapter in that it provides an excellent summary of the whole book. It might have been better to have placed summaries for each chapter at the end of each chapter rather than at the end of the book. I would have preferred more of a synthesis to conclude the book. Historical overviews are interesting and useful contributions to the body of knowledge about a given topic. The final chapter does take a look at the future and the author provides excellent insights about the development of traditional and new media in the region.

Electronic Tigers of Southeast Asia: The Politics of Media, Technology, and National Development is an excellent addition to the field of international communication. It will serve as an excellent supplemental text to courses on international broadcasting or international communication.

Rating

Rating Criteria Rating
Theoretical Approach / Methodology ++++
Structure ++++
Depth of the Analysis ++++
Contribution of new Knowledge ++++
Applicability ++++
Clarity and Style of Writing ++++
Rating Points: excellent: ++++ poor: +

Iowa State University Press, 2002
218 pages

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